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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

12 April 1960

MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR

SUBJECT: THE OUTLOOK FOR THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

The Trujillo Regime

1. In our last estimate dealing with the Dominican Republic (SNIE 00/1-59, 29 December 1959, paragraphs 7, 53-60) we stated that the 30-year Trujillo dictatorship was in trouble, but concluded that it probably would remain in power through 1960. Since then the anti-Trujillo tide has gathered momentum, and we now regard the condition of his regime as precarious. We cannot predict the time or the circumstances in which the regime would be likely to be overthrown.

2. A notable change in the country's political atmosphere has developed since the wholesale arrests in January, in which members of almost every prominent Dominican family were seized, in many cases with great brutality, and subjected to heavy fines and jail sentences. Drastic action may in fact have been necessary to break what appears to have been an extensive revolutionary

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conspiracy; precise information as to how far plotting to overthrow Trujillo had proceeded is still lacking. However, the magnitude and severity of the government's crackdown revealed the regime's nervousness, made it more intolerable to leading elements in Dominican society, and alienated the Catholic Church. The latter is now Trujillo's most outspoken opponent inside the country.

3. Recent arrests of university students and new trials of alleged plotters suggest that public unrest is spreading. Within the armed services, which remain the mainstay of the regime, a few new signs of rivalry and dissension have appeared; six army officers have been imprisoned and an air force officer is the latest in a series of defectors. The arrest of close relatives of high ranking officers, a reduction in the perquisites of the armed forces, and some terrorist activities directed against individuals in these forces are probably also having an adverse effect on their loyalty.

4. The economic situation has deteriorated further. Business is stagnant, and an increasing number of people are suffering economic hardship. In addition to some flight of private capital, members of the Trujillo family are reported to have made substantial withdrawals from the national reserve bank -- a development

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which might seriously weaken the government's financial position. Even if these reports prove unfounded, or exaggerated, the spread of rumors that such withdrawals were taking place would obviously contribute to a decline in public confidence in the regime.

5. On the other hand, Trujillo himself shows no signs of relinquishing control, and there is no information to indicate that discontent in the military is widespread. The plans of the internal opposition probably have been set back by the regime's repressive measures. The numerous exile groups lack cohesion and effectiveness, despite the encouragement and support given them not only by Castro but also by moderate leaders such as Venezuelan President Betancourt. There are deep dividings between pro-Communist and anti-Communist elements within these groups.

6. However, the outcome in the Dominican situation is likely to depend less on the strength of opposition forces than on psychological factors. We believe that the fall of the regime will be increasingly anticipated as time goes on. When there comes to be a general sense that the regime's days are numbered -- or if Trujillo himself becomes convinced that he is through -- the regime will probably collapse quite suddenly.

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The Succession

7. The character of the regime which will eventually succeed Trujillo will depend upon the time and circumstances of Trujillo's departure. In present circumstances, we think it unlikely that Trujillo will be overthrown by a Castro-type invasion or revolution. It is more likely that Trujillo will eventually be forced to leave by a military junta acting with the support of the upper and middle classes and the Church. The longer his departure is delayed, the more explosive the situation is likely to become.

8. Castro has already failed in an attempt to overthrow the Trujillo regime through an invasion by Dominican exiles with Cuban support. His agrarian reform program apparently still has little appeal for the Dominican peasantry, who generally still regard Trujillo as the Benefactor. The upper and middle classes, though disaffected toward Trujillo, are repelled by the excesses of the Castro regime in Cuba. The military remain loyal to Trujillo and are additionally antagonized by what they have seen happening in Cuba. Thus there is now in the Dominican Republic no important element of Dominican society motivated to support a Castro-type invasion or revolution.

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9. Nevertheless, tension is rising in the Dominican Republic and the eventual fall of the regime will be increasingly anticipated. In such circumstances, persons of property and military officers, apart from Trujillo's personal associates, will become increasingly anxious to effect a change of regime before uncontrollable disorder develops. At the psychological moment in this progression, it would be in accord with Latin American custom for a military junta to call upon the dictator to depart before the situation got out of hand. In such matters, however, timing is of the essence. A premature move could be fatal. On the other hand, to hesitate too long would permit an uncontrollable situation to develop.

10. If its timing were right, a military junta with upper and middle class support could probably take over the Dominican Republic without serious resistance. However, such a regime would immediately face serious difficulties. Spontaneous jubilation over the fall of a repressive dictatorship would entail a considerable amount of disorder: destruction of the property of conspicuous beneficiaries of the fallen regime, attacks on the lives of any of its active supporters who had failed to escape in time. The efforts of the new government to maintain or restore order would be resented as further repression of the people. Although the fall of Trujillo would mean liberation to the

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upper and middle classes, the urban proletariat and the peasants would not regard with enthusiasm a military-upper class regime. Returning exiles would feel that they, rather than the stay-at-homes, were entitled by their sacrifices to lead the new regime. The generally more radical exiles would probably incite the masses against a moderate government. Within the government itself, there might be a struggle for power between military and civilian elements. Finally, the Trujillo family has so dominated the Dominican economy that the confusion attendant upon their sudden departure would probably worsen an already bad economic situation.

11. Although Castro is probably incapable of overthrowing the Trujillo dictatorship, the political turmoil which would follow the fall of that dictatorship would afford him manifest opportunities for political intervention in the Dominican Republic. Castro would certainly do all in his power to incite the masses against a moderate regime and to call for a radical revolution on the Cuban model. Paradoxically, the intense loyalty which Trujillo has developed among the peasantry might provide Castro supporters with an opportunity to arouse peasant bitterness against a successor government. Unless a moderate Dominican government received prompt support from sympathetic governments of an undoubtedly liberal character (Venezuela, for instance), Castro might emerge as the ultimate victor.

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12. Although US relations with the Trujillo regime have not been consistently good, his fall would almost certainly lead to a decline in US influence in the Dominican Republic. Even among moderate elements, there is considerable resentment of past US support for and failure to intervene against the Trujillo dictatorship. Furthermore, almost any new regime would feel a need to demonstrate to the Dominican people and to other Caribbean peoples that it was not under US domination. However, a moderate government would also be in desperate need of US assistance. If the US were to render essential aid discreetly, while tolerating occasional demonstrations of Dominican sovereignty, such a government would probably cooperate in fundamental matters. If, on the other hand, a government sympathetic with Fidel Castro were eventually to come to power, US-Dominican relations would inevitably follow the course of US-Cuban relations.

FOR THE BOARD OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

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SHERMAN KENT
Chairman

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